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AUTHOR Griswold, Philip A.
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ABSTRACT

Teachers' uses of and concerns with various assessment procedures were surveyed in the Parkrose School District, Portland, Oregon. All 229 district teachers and student service staff were asked to complete a questionnaire. A total of 211 questionnaires was returned for a response rate of 92%; however, all but one of the analyses were based on the responses of 102 elementary school teachers (ESTs) and 100 secondary school teachers (SSTs). The questionnaire, a modification of an instrument developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, examined teachers' uses and concerns regarding five categories of testing: (1) teacher-developed objective; (2) textbook embedded; (3) standardized achievement; (4) curriculum-referenced and district-developed; and (5) teacher observation and development. In the classroom, teachers used observation and judgment more than any other types of tests, and teacher-made tests were the second most popular type. Standardized achievement tests were used the least. SSTs used more teacher-made tests, and ESTs used more observation. Teachers were most concerned about improving the quality of observation and objective tests that they developed. ESTs were more concerned about the conflict with instructional time and student reaction to standardized testing. It is recommended that the district formulate and implement a district policy on testing. Two tables present survey data. Appendices provide the philosophy and proposed testing policy, teacher targets on testing, and a teacher target sheet on test construction. (SLD)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

An Occasional Report to the Superintendent

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TESTING:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT POLICY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

by

Philip A. Griswold

Office of Management Services

Parkrose School District No. 3

10636 N. E. Prescott St.

Portland, OR 97220

TM 012 047

ABSTRACT

Teachers are pivotal actors in the implementation of performance-based educational change and in evaluation of student performance. Research on teachers' testing and evaluation practices provides but a sketch of evidence for school districts to consider when preparing for performance-based educational change activities. A survey of all district teachers suggests that teacher observation and judgment, and teacher made objective tests are used extensively for classroom testing. And teachers are most concerned with improving these forms of testing. Elementary teachers and secondary teachers differ on the use of tests and other assessment, but not on their concerns. Recommendations are made for district policy and staff development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A district commitment to school improvement and the subsequent need for student performance data led to our district's concern for testing philosophy, policy and practice. Teachers have a great deal of responsibility for the testing practices. They administer district tests, develop their own, interpret test results and by default become accountable to test results. In order to formulate policy related to testing, teachers' uses of and concerns with various assessment procedures were surveyed.

Methods

All district teachers and student service staff were asked to complete a questionnaire. A total of 211 questionnaires were returned for a response rate greater than 90%.

The questionnaire was a modification of an instrument developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985). It surveyed teachers' uses and concerns regarding five categories of testing:

1. Teacher-developed objective
2. Textbook-embedded,
3. Standardized achievement,
4. Curriculum-referenced, district developed,
5. Teacher observation and judgment.

Response rates were crossed with types of tests and teacher grouping. Open-ended comments were transcribed and organized into naturally emerging categories.

Results and Discussion

Teachers used their observation and judgment more than any of

the other type of tests. Teacher-made tests were the second most popular. The least used test was reported to be standardized achievement tests. Secondary teachers differed from elementary teachers in the pattern of use: secondary used more teacher-made objective tests and elementary more observation.

Teachers were most concerned with their observation and the objective tests which they develop. The levels of concern frequently expressed was the need for improving the quality of these tests. Elementary teachers were more concerned about the conflict with instructional time and student reaction to standardized testing. The smallest number of concerns reported were for standardized and text-embedded tests.

Teachers' comments were sorted into the following categories:

1. Establishing the purposes of testing,
2. Matching the test items with the curriculum,
3. Dependability of the test results,
4. Amount of testing,
5. Readily available test results,
6. Proper interpretation and utilization of test results,
7. Effects of testing on students.

Teachers accurately identified sound criteria for testing policy.

Policy Recommendations

1. It would be in the best interests of the district to establish a philosophy statement for the testing of student learning. This would provide staff and students with a general understanding of the nature and intent of student testing.

2. In order to inculcate that philosophy into practice a district policy should be formulated.

3. Finally, to partially implement the policy, it is recommended that the Staff Development Program support inservice for the improvement of teacher-made tests.

Actions

The Superintendent accepted and initiated work on all recommendations. The past year has seen the following accomplishments.

1. A committee of teachers and administrators developed a philosophy statement and general policy regarding the assessment of student learning. (See Exhibit A.)

2. The high school staff and administrative group agreed to set one of the two 1987-88 Job Targets to be the improvement of teacher-made tests. (See Exhibit B and C.) Subsequently, their School Improvement Committee was trained in three areas of test improvement: a) multiple choice test item writing, b) essay test writing and c) construction of test specification tables for end of course tests. The committee then trained all staff during three one-half day inservice sessions. The last session is scheduled for May 1988.

INTRODUCTION

For the last five years, a highly publicized movement in education has been underway to improve student achievement. It is referred to as the effective schools movement and essentially is based upon three assumptions derived from research (Bickel, 1983). First, schools can be identified as unusually effective in teaching basic skills to disadvantaged children as measured by standardized tests. Secondly, these schools exhibit attributes which are related to their success in promoting higher student achievement and the attributes are capable of being manipulated. Finally, these attributes form the basis of strategies to improve schools not considered successful.

The results of this research have been thoroughly reviewed and summarized (e.g., Mackenzie, 1983; Griswold, Cotton, & Hansen, 1986; Purkey & Smith, 1983). The common attributes related to higher achievement are:

1. Safe, orderly and supportive climate conducive to learning and a belief that all students can learn,
2. Strong instructional leaders setting high standards and creating incentives for learning,
3. A schoolwide emphasis on instruction as the primary mission with clear goals and objectives,
4. Frequent testing of student learning feeding into a data-based, decision making system.

As implementation of these attributes progresses, it is ultimately at the individual classroom level where a school's

effectiveness will be determined. Students are expected to achieve more in the classroom following implementation of effective schooling strategies.

Successful implementation of educational change must meet the needs of the teachers (e.g., Fullan, 1985; McLaughlin, 1978). Thus, the effectiveness of school improvement efforts, must include teachers' input into the selection, administration and utilization of instruments used to measure the effectiveness.

Our teachers have a great deal of responsibility for the assessment of student performance. They are required to administer district tests, develop their own classroom tests, interpret test results and implicitly become accountable to test results. However, at best, teachers have modest college preparation for this critical educational responsibility (Gullickson, 1986; Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1982; 1985).

Now, to sum up the rationale for this study. Our district planned an "effective schooling" effort during 1986-87 to improve student achievement. The expectation was to use existing district tests as the effectiveness measures. Yet our district has no testing policy to guide teachers and administrators. Nor have have we solicited broad, formal input from the ultimate change agents, the teachers, to assist in determining the direction of the testing program. Given the conclusions of the educational change literature, teachers' needs and attitudes towards testing and evaluation must be part of the effective schooling process. Thus, the study was designed to provide evidence of teachers' positions on testing to build a district philosophy and policy statement for the measurement of student achievement. It was also expected to

have implications for staff development in the area of testing and evaluation.

METHOD

All district teachers (special education included) were requested by the building principal or appropriate supervisor to complete the survey of testing practices. Completion of the survey occurred during the first two weeks of December.

<Note. The district is located within a metropolitan area. The district serves approximately 3200 students, K-12, in five elementary schools, one middle and one senior high school. The student body is approximately 88% white, 6% Asian, 4% Black. The teaching staff has a median age of 44. The median years experience in the district is 13. Nearly 56% of the teachers hold the master's degree.>

A total of 211 questionnaires were received out of 229 possible, yielding a response rate of 92%. Seven questionnaires were excluded because they were incomplete or incorrectly completed. Two more questionnaires were omitted because the respondents had wide cross-grade level responsibility and could not be categorized as elementary or secondary. The exclusions reduced the N to 202. For analysis, the population was divided into two broad grade level groups: elementary (K-6), N=102; secondary (7-12), N=100. In one of the analyses, one respondent neglected to fill in a section of the questionnaire. The resulting N for analysis was reduced to 201.

The questionnaire used to evaluate testing used in the classroom an abbreviated version of an instrument developed by researchers at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985). The classroom assessment practices

were divided into five categories or test types:

1. Teacher-developed objective tests for use in their classroom,
2. Tests which were provided as part of published text materials,
3. Published standardized achievement tests,
4. Minimum competency tests developed within the district which are specific to district curriculum objectives, and
5. Teacher observations and judgments of student performance.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of brief descriptions of the five types of tests. Teachers were asked to read and respond to the descriptions by giving examples of each assessment which they use. The responses served as a general check of the teachers' understanding of the test types.

The next set of questions explored teachers' use of the assessment techniques. The teachers' levels of use ratings were: (1) nonuse, (2) anticipated, (3) difficult, (4) comfortable, and (5) collaborating with others.

The final set of questions probed for teachers' perceptions of their own testing needs by asking them to identify their primary concern about each test type. They could select from several categories of concerns: 1) No concerns, 2) Logistics, (a) amount of time required, (b) reactions of students to testing and (c) collegial relationships to use tests, 3) Improvement, (a) experience and training and (b) effective use.

Following the ratings, a final question permitted teachers to add other concerns or suggestions which they might have about the use of the five types of tests.

Levels of use were collapsed into two categories: Infrequent and Regular. The frequency of responses was compared to an expected frequency of .50. The percent of all the responses for elementary (K-6) and secondary (7-12) teachers were compared.

Levels of concern were collapsed into three categories: Non Concerns, Logistics of Testing and Test Improvement. The frequency of response was compared to expected frequencies of .33. As with levels of use, elementary and secondary teachers' responses were compared.

The Chi square statistic was used to test for similarity of proportions. The results of the analyses are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. Varying degrees of freedom (df), mean that empty rows or rows with very small counts were omitted to increase the accuracy of the statistic.

RESULTS

Test Use

Referring to Table 1, teachers, as part of their classroom assessment, make most use of their observations and judgments and their own objective tests. More than 90% make regular use of their observations and more than 80% relied upon their objective tests.

Approximately half the teachers use textbook tests and district minimum competency tests. There were slightly more textbook test than competency test users.

More than two thirds did not use standardized tests. This test type has the largest number of infrequent users.

Secondary and elementary teachers differed on standardized, minimum competency and textbook test use. Secondary teachers used these tests less than elementary teachers.

Test Concerns

Referring to Table 2, more than half of the teachers feel that for classroom assessment, their own observation and judgments, and objective tests need improvement. However, nearly one third have no concerns.

About one third think that the textbook and district minimum competency tests need improvement. One third to one half report no concerns.

More than one third of the teachers report no concerns with standardized tests. Less than one third were concerned with their improvement.

Two to nearly three times as many teachers see a need for improvement in teacher-made tests or observations than for textbook, competency or standardized tests. This may reflect the reality that improvement of the former tests are within the control of the teacher.

The differences between elementary and secondary teachers was most evident for standardized tests. A third of the elementary teachers were concerned with the time required to test. Nearly twice as many secondary teachers reported no concerns.

Summary

While eight to nine out of ten teachers use their own tests and observations, for classroom assessment, more than one half feel these tests are in need of improvement. Two thirds of teachers make infrequent use of standardized tests; over one third have no concerns. Standardized tests pose the greatest percent of concerns with respect to the logistics of testing.

Anecdotal Remarks

Following the quantitative analysis, written teachers' comments from the survey sheets were transcribed onto index cards. They were read and sorted into naturally emerging categories. Typical comments for each category were summarized in the following paragraphs.

Purposes of Testing. Many teachers were concerned with the purpose of standardized and minimum competency tests. They felt that the purpose should be well defined. Tests are learning tools to be used by teachers and students to assess the progress of student learning. Tests should not be used to compare schools or teachers. The importance of the test should be conveyed to the student and the results should be provided to students and teachers in a timely fashion.

Curriculum and Test Alignment. Another area of concern expressed by teachers was the degree to which the tests used in the district measure what they purport to measure, i.e., are the test items parallel with the curriculum? Teachers expressed concerns with textbook tests, competency tests and district standardized achievement tests.

The problem with text embedded tests seems to be their failure to test completely the material covered by the teacher. The tests emphasize a point not emphasized by the teacher and were perceived to be poorly developed.

The district minimum competency tests, particularly the reading component, are not considered an accurate measure of competency. Students, particularly those with exceptional needs, may pass the reading competency, but are unable to read at grade

level.

The standardized achievement test was criticized because it does not follow the district curriculum. For example, the language arts test emphasizes parts of speech, whereas our curriculum emphasizes writing and editing. Furthermore, the reading test's vocabulary, length and item format are very difficult for most third graders.

The achievement test is not appropriate for students with special needs. The format and content are too difficult and may damage the student's already fragile self-esteem. It is repetitive of the resource center testing and yields little useful data.

Several teachers commented on the usefulness of assessment based upon their observation and judgment. They expressed concern over not using this method more formally.

Reliability. Factors affecting reliability of tests such as test length, the testing environment and test administration procedures were referred to in teachers' comments. They indicated that test administration conventions were either not available or if they were, were not followed.

Amount of Testing. The impact of the amount of testing and test development on instructional time was a major concern. Teachers need more time if they are to develop meaningful assessments or improve upon the ones they use. Loss of instructional time is particularly wasteful if the tests provide little useful information for student and teacher.

Interestingly, concern for too much testing was offset to some extent by concern over more tests -- particularly at the primary level. Some need for primary grade tests was expressed. The tests

would provide a vehicle for assessing reading skills, thus enabling agreement on a district benchmark. The other purpose served by primary testing would be to provide students with test-taking experience.

Utilization of Test Results. The availability, utilization and coordination of test results were raised by teachers. Timely feedback on student performance to teachers is needed if test results are to be useful. In addition to timeliness, sharing between resource centers or screening teams and classroom teachers will enhance the usefulness of the test results.

Utilization of test results presupposes sufficient knowledge of test characteristics and score interpretation. Several teachers indicated that information about tests and testing would be useful to them. Specifically, they suggested information about district tests be made available to new teachers. Some questioned their expertise in using tests and others wanted to know how to obtain certain types of tests for their classroom use.

Student Effects. Many teachers indicated the need to consider the impact of testing on students. Besides jeopardizing instructional time, testing raises frustration and anxiety levels and threatens self-esteem. To overcome the effect, teachers identified two strategies: 1) reduce the amount of testing and 2) provide students with test taking skills and practice.

Summary. The teachers' comments about testing concerns can be summarized according to seven areas of concern. They are:

1. Clearly define the instructional and evaluation needs for testing,
2. Ensure a congruency between the curriculum

and the tests,

3. Use tests which result in consistent scores from test to test,
4. Keep the amount of testing realistic, i.e., only enough to support instructional and district evaluation needs,
5. Provide prompt feedback on test results to students and teachers,
6. Use test results effectively by ensuring that the staff has the knowledge and information to do so,
7. Be sensitive to the effect of testing on students and take steps to minimize their anxiety through test-taking skills and practice.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study are congruent with research reporting observations and judgments, and teacher-made objective tests to be the frequently used forms of classroom assessment. Teachers were most concerned with the improvement of these types of testing. Standardized tests were rated lowest in use.

Secondary teachers preferred teacher-made objective tests slightly more than elementary teachers. The converse was true for observation and judgment. Elementary teachers reported that they used textbook and minimum competency tests more than secondary teachers. Elementary teachers were more concerned with the effects which tests have on students.

Finally, teachers' extended comments indicated additional concerns and suggestions necessary for a responsible testing

program. They want clarity on the function of testing from the district, attention paid to curricular validity and reliability, realistic amounts of testing, prompt return of test results and opportunities to enrich their knowledge of test development and utilization.

Sensitivity to elementary and secondary testing differences is essential for maximum effectiveness of test results. Planning for school improvement at the elementary level must consider effectiveness indicators that include teacher observation and judgment, textbook tests. The planning must also be sensitive to teachers' concern with encroachment on instructional time. At the secondary level, improvement of teacher-made tests is needed as is ensuring that these tests have validity among instructors in the same department.

The differences between the two broad grade-levels undoubtedly reflect level of development of their students, the number of students for which teachers are responsible, and grading and related administrative requirements. Nevertheless, when selecting effectiveness measures for school improvement projects, to overlook these differences could jeopardize the ability to evaluate the instructional effectiveness of different grade levels.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It would be in the best interests of the district to establish a philosophy statement for the testing of student learning. This would provide staff and students with a general understanding of the nature and intent of student testing.

2. In order to inculcate that philosophy into practice a district policy should be formulated.

3. Finally, to partially implement the policy, it is recommended that the Staff Development Program support inservice for the improvement of teacher-made tests.

POSTSCRIPT

The Superintendent accepted and initiated work on all recommendations. The past year has seen the following accomplishments.

1. A committee of teachers and administrators, chaired by the Administrator for Management Services, developed a philosophy statement and general policy regarding the assessment of student learning. (See Exhibit A.)

2. The high school staff and administrative group agreed to set one of the two 1987-88 Job Targets to be the improvement of teacher-made tests. (See Exhibit B and C.) Subsequently, their School Improvement Committee was trained by the Administrator for Management Services in three areas of test improvement: a) multiple choice test item writing, b) essay test writing and c) construction of test specification tables for end of course tests. The committee then trained all staff during three one-half day inservice sessions. The last session is scheduled for May 1988.

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TABLE 1. Test Type by Test Use of Elementary (EL) and Secondary (SEC) Teachers

LEVEL OF USE	Teacher-made Objective			Textbook Embedded			Standardized Publisher's			Minimum Competency			Teacher Observation		
	%EL	%SEC	FREQ	%EL	%SEC	FREQ	%EL	%SEC	FREQ	%EL	%SEC	FREQ	%EL	%SEC	FREQ
(N:)	(102)	(100)	202	(102)	(100)	202	(102)	(100)	202	(102)	(100)	202	(102)	(100)	202
Infrequent			30			84			142			115			11
Nonuse,	12	7		25	43		44	73		33	58		1	7	
Anticipated,	1	1*		1	3*		3	4		5	1		--	--*	
or Difficult	8	1		9	3		15	2		12	5		1	2	
Regular			172			118			60			87			191
Comfortable	41	66		31	22		12	8		30	12		45	51	
Collaborative	38	25		34	29		26	13		20	24		53	40	
Chi squared	15.14		56.95	10.10		2.88	22.41		17.36	20.55		1.95	6.80		100.06
df	3		1	3		1	4		1	5		1	2		1
Probability	<.005		<.000	<.025		<.09	<.005		<.000	<.005		<.16	<.05		<.000

*Row not included in calculation of statistic.

TABLE 2. Test Type by Testing Concerns of Elementary (EL) and Secondary (SEC) Teachers

LEVEL OF CONCERN	Teacher-made Objective			Textbook Embedded			Standardized Publisher's			Minimum Competency			Teacher Observation		
	%EL	%SEC	FREQ	%EL	%SEC	FREQ	%EL	%SEC	FREQ	%EL	%SEC	FREQ	%EL	%SEC	FREQ
(N:)	(102)	(100)	202	(102)	(100)	202	(102)	(100)	202	(102)	(100)	202	(102)	(100)	202
No Concerns	27	30	58	38	53	92	27	50	78	25	46	72	27	33	61
Logistics			26			48			76			61			21
Time Required to Use Tests	8	6		14	2		33	14		18	5		1	4*	
Student Reactions	3	5		14	8		17	5		10	4		2	1*	
Using with Colleagues	4	0*		8	2		3	3		12	12		9	4	
Improvement			115			62			48			69			111
Experience & Training	0	3		3	1*		6	10		8	3		3	6	
Effectiveness	58	56		24	34		14	18		27	30		58	52	
Chi squared	<1		31.37	18.09		7.26	22.57		4.54	17.80		<1	3.69		35.06
df	3		2	4		2	5		2	5		2	3		2
Probability	ns		<.000	<.005		<.026	<.005		<.10	<.005		ns	ns		<.000

*Row not included in calculation of statistic.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Statement of Philosophy

The district believes that students and parents need and have the right to know the extent to which students have learned what they were taught. Furthermore, the evidence should be collected as necessary and provided in the form of reliable student achievement information to those responsible for making instructional decisions.

The student achievement measures should be clearly related to stated goals and objectives of instruction, and free of racial, cultural and gender biases. The achievement information should be used as an aid to learning, as well as a scale of what has been learned. Finally, while efforts will be made to develop valid measures for the entire curriculum, curriculum and instruction should never be constrained by the availability of formal assessment measures.

General Policy

The comprehensive program to assess student learning includes:

1. Teacher-developed tests to measure student attainment of instructional goals and objective,
2. Course or grade-level tests specifically aligned with the curriculum,
3. Standardized achievement tests providing a basis for reviewing group achievement in comparison to national reference groups and,
4. Specialized testing to satisfy diagnostic, program placement or legally mandated information needs.

TEACHER TARGETS - 1987-1988

For the past several years teacher targets have centered on the act of teaching. This year we will focus on what is taught. Many of us have invested a great deal of time rewriting Curriculum Guides, Planned Course Statements,and Planned Course Outlines. It is appropriate that we now check to see if what was written during the quiet of summer provides a realistic guide for what will be taught during the school year. We will, therefore ask you to address the following target:

TARGET #1

The teacher will choose one course that he/she is currently teaching and review the Planned Course Statement /Outline carefully. Throughout the year the teacher will maintain a brief journal that explains how the topics described in the Planned Course Statement/Outline match with what is actually being taught. The summary sheet should include a reference as to:

1. How much time was devoted to each topic and is this the same as what was stated in the course outline?
2. What, if any, topics did not get covered?
3. What additional topics do you feel should be added to the Planned Course Statement?
4. Are there other concerns you have about this course? If so, what are they?

The requirements of this target are not intended to be unrealistic. A one or two page summary is sufficient. For someone who wishes to do an intensive curriculum alignment project, that will be a satisfactory topic for an Individual Self-Renewal Project.

TARGET #2

The second target is in response to in-servicing provided at Faculty Meetings and Teacher In-Service sessions. All necessary information and the opportunity to complete the requirements of the target will be provided at the 7:30 - 9:00 in-service sessions

Using concepts learned in the on-going teacher in-service, the teacher will reconstruct at least one test that has been previously used. A summary sheet will include:

1. The name of the colleague who has been consulted on the refinement of this test.
2. At least three refinements that have been made on the instrument because of concepts or skills learned in the teacher in-service sessions.
3. Copies of the original and revised items.

TARGET SHEET

EXHIBIT C

EDUCATION BY OBJECTIVES

Format for Writing TARGETS (list one target per sheet)

CORE FUNCTION (Key area of RESPONSIBILITY)

Testing

TARGET - What needs to be CONCENTRATED on? - PLANNED DIRECTION -- Objectives for self-development and improvement, to solve problems, to create innovations, to maintain.

Curricular unity consists of 3 elements.
1) the written curriculum, 2) the taught curriculum and 3) measurement and testing devices we use to assess the learning of the students. This target will focus on how we can create tests to best assess student learning. We all have students who are not working up to their maximum potential. How we evaluate their learning is an important factor in measuring student success.

ACTIONS - (Describe the actions that need to be taken,) research analysis, develop, consult, report schedule, etc.	BENCHMARKS Measure of control Monitoring and final dates
Using the concepts learned in the on-going inservice, sessions, I will revise at least one test that has been previously used. I will write a summary sheet which will include the following: a. The name of the colleague who has been consulted on the refinement of this test. b. At least three refinements that have been made on the instrument because of concepts or skills learned in the in-service sessions. c. attach copies of the original and revised test items or test.	Both of these items will be completed in the three Teacher Inservice sessions which are scheduled for 7:30 - 9:00 am on Dec. 1, March 8, and May 10.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS - (What is outcome expected?) Increased quality, quantity, time, saving, etc.

By carefully constructing my tests, I will be able to accurately assess what students have learned, make any necessary adjustments and help them to better attain the stated course goals.

_____ _____ Teacher
Date

TE 21
Septeaber, 1975
(Computer print 1987, bc)